



**“A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT”**

**PAPER BY**

**AMBASSADOR SAID T. JAWAD**

**AMBASSADOR OF AFGHANISTAN TO THE UNITED STATES**

**FOUNDATION FOR THE DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACIES “LEADING THINKERS” WORKSHOP**

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## A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY IN A REGIONAL CONTEXT

When President Barack Obama presented his new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan in late March 2009, President Hamid Karzai embraced the new elements introduced, promised full cooperation and called for adequate resources for their full implementation. Crafted from internal deliberations between a number of U.S. agencies and with the consultation of both the Afghan and Pakistani governments, the new strategy is comprehensive in its approach and for the first time places the challenges facing Afghanistan in a larger regional cooperation context. The regional context and additional resources are the focus of this paper.

While the strategy calls for new security and development, one should not lose sight of the accomplishments made in Afghanistan in the past years with relatively limited resources. We have welcomed home about five million Afghan refugees – which is one of the largest return movements in history. Afghanistan's income per capita has grown from a dismal US \$185 in 2002 to US \$450 today. Thousands of miles of roads have been built and paved, and three-quarters of Afghanistan's nearly 40,000 villages have benefited from our rural development projects. Today, we have over six and half million boys and girls attending schools, the highest level in our history. We have established hundreds of clinics and hospitals around the country, boosting our basic health coverage from nine percent of the population seven years ago to over 85 percent today. About 38 percent of the 46,500 students who entered universities this year were girls. This would have been unthinkable only a few years ago.

These historical achievements have come at a dear cost, with the sacrifices of hundreds of U.S. servicemen and women and thousands of Afghan civilians, policemen and soldiers. These achievements must serve as distinct reminder of what the mutual respect, cooperation and collective efforts of the Afghan people and our international partners yield.

Now with the distinguished foreign policy team of President Obama, notably Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, National Security Advisor General James Jones, Special Envoy Ambassador Richard Holbrooke and Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, we have a dedicated and stronger leadership for building upon our mutual accomplishments. We are looking forward to working with this very capable team to expand measures on a number of components of a comprehensive strategy: security, reconciliation, development, governance, corruption, a civilian surge and narcotics.

### Security

On the security front, while significant challenges still remain, the consensus that has gradually emerged about the regional dimension of the terrorist threat is a major step. As well as fighting any terrorists present on the Afghan soil decisively, we must no longer tolerate any sanctuaries, networks and support-bases in the neighborhood. We must work sincerely to convince, isolate, reform or remove those entities that may be using extremism to advance political goals, and cut the arteries through which terrorism is sustained.

In this context, we welcome the growing recognition that without true and sincere cooperation from Afghanistan's neighbors, victory over terrorism cannot be assured. The close partnership



we have developed with the democratically elected president of Pakistan has become a valuable asset to close regional cooperation. The valuable role played by the Republic of Turkey, a mutual friend of Afghanistan and Pakistan, in furthering confidence and cooperation between the two countries, must also receive special recognition. Other regional partners such as Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Iran are also playing an important role to bring Afghanistan and Pakistan together.

As a matter of strategic priority, we will move ever more aggressively towards *Afghanisation* of the security sector through an urgent and decisive increase of the size and capability of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP) to assume responsibility in the fight against terrorism and to provide security and rule of law for our citizens. We are very encouraged by the greater openness from our international partners towards the expansion of the Afghan security forces and providing them with standard-issue NATO weapons and equipment. Indeed, building up the Afghan security capacity will be the surest, most sustainable and least costly way to overcome the threat of terrorism, provide security to Afghanistan and serve as a reliable partner in a challenging region. We welcome the planned expansion of the ANA from 80,000 to 134,000 troops, though under the current security threat we believe that we will need 250,000 to independently address security challenges.

### Reconciliation

We also have the policy of reconciliation and dialogue in the centre of our strategy for achieving peace. What is vital to any process of engagement with the Taliban is that negotiation will succeed only if we talk to them from the position of strength. As long as they are perceived to be successful, they do not need to talk to us. For the Taliban, victory merely means destroying and disrupting. If we cannot effectively stop them from doing so, why should they talk to us?

### Development

We all know very well that sustainable development is the best assurance for our permanent victory over terrorism. Success will depend on the extent to which we can show to our people that they can aspire to better, more rewarding lives and that their children will not live the calamitous lives their parents have endured due to decades of conflict and interference.

As part of ensuring that development continues to occur, we have requested that the additional aid that has been pledged for Afghanistan by the U.S. and the international community be funneled through the Afghan budget or trust funds and that it respond to local needs and demands. The National Solidarity Program (NSP) can serve as a model of the local, demand-driven development that has produced over 40,000 projects in 22,000 villages in all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces.

In this regard, we must also address the widespread grievance among Afghan public concerning the wastage of reconstruction resources that are outside the government's sphere of influence. To make the Afghan government truly and meaningfully accountable, we call on donors to adopt measures towards aid effectiveness and avoid the use of parallel structures that undermine the development and legitimacy of national institutions.



## Governance

The significance of good governance cannot be overstated. It is hardly surprising that a country emerging from decades of devastation and war will face a rocky path in rebuilding its broken institutions and putting them to service of the populace. Having said that, the achievements we have had in building up institutions and improving governance at various levels over the past seven years have been remarkable. This progress is by no means enough. We must continue our efforts for years to come to reach a satisfactory level of national and sub-national governance.

## Corruption

The fight against corruption lies at the heart of our focus on improving governance. Consistent with the Afghan government's commitment made in Paris last year, we have taken important steps to fight corruption. In the past one year, many people, including senior government officials of up to cabinet rank, have been dismissed, prosecuted or punished for corruption. The establishment of the High Office of Oversight & Anti-Corruption including special units in the Office of the Attorney General and in the Judiciary will provide us with the necessary institutional framework to translate our commitment into further tangible actions.

Let there be no doubt that we will not spare any effort towards building an effective, accountable, and transparent government that the Afghan people can trust and let there be no doubt about our commitment and resolve to fight corruption of any nature. We know it well that it is going to be a daunting and long-term challenge to tackle a menace which is the product of thirty years of war, destruction of institutions and impoverishment. Fighting corruption in such an environment will require a comprehensive approach with a focus on law enforcement, improving laws and regulations, streamlining procedures, increased accountability mechanisms and public education. In this context, we welcome President Obama's call for an anti-corruption compact between the government of Afghanistan and the international community with time-bound benchmarks and well-defined mutual responsibilities.

## Civilian Surge

We must also continue to build the capacities of our own public servants and the institutions in which they work. To this end, we welcome and support President Obama plan to surge the number of civilians working in Afghanistan. We have submitted a detailed plan for a national civilian surge that would create a demand-driven vehicle to provide technical assistance in line with the needs and priorities of the Afghan government. Our plan addresses the issue of capacity-building and would help overcome the shortage of human capital in government ministries and institutions. It would also increase the government's visibility and help reduce dependency on the international community.

## Narcotics

Another major challenge that will not go away easily is the problem of poppy cultivation and drug trade. After seeing several successive years of up-spiral in poppy cultivation across the country, our counter narcotics efforts have paid off as we saw a 20 percent reduction in 2008, and anticipate a further 20 to 30 percent reduction this year. In 2005, only three out of



Afghanistan's 34 provinces were poppy-free. Today the number of provinces which are now free of poppy is 22. Last year, over 600 drug-lords and dealers were arrested and 35 percent of them have already been convicted. These achievements have not come about without a cost. Hundreds of Afghan policemen have sacrificed their lives in eradication of crops, interdiction and bringing criminals to justice. Today, poppy cultivation in Afghanistan is mainly concentrated in those districts that are either partially or completely outside the control of the Afghan government. So our continued success in fighting poppy cultivation will depend on regaining control of these areas.

To win the war on drugs, we also call for a new compact between Afghanistan and its international partners with a revised division of labor. We are fully committed to implementing an Afghan-led and owned strategy of counter-narcotics with a much stronger emphasis on effective alternative livelihood development and robust law enforcement. We call on our international partners to provide through the Afghan budget the necessary resources and to hold us accountable for achieving results.

The year 2009 will be a critical year for Afghans as well as the international mission. The challenges we face in this year will test our resolve, and will shape the future in a significant way. Together, we will work hard to prepare for and hold the presidential and provincial assembly elections on August 20. This election represents an important milestone in our journey towards consolidating democracy and stability in Afghanistan. Therefore it is crucial to ensure that free, fair, credible and secure elections are held across Afghanistan.

Beyond the thematic elements of the new strategy, the dynamics of Afghanistan's regional relations will play a defining role in helping overcome existing challenges. Allow me to briefly discuss the nature of our relations with major countries in the region.

### Pakistan

The political and civilian leadership and the two democratically-elected presidents of Afghanistan and Pakistan have never had such close and trustful relations and extensive bilateral engagement in the history of two countries as they do today. We hope that this will be matched by delivery by Pakistan's security institutions.

We are all concerned about the security situation in Pakistan. We are in favor of cooperating with Pakistan on a trilateral basis, such as in the U.S.-Afghan-Pakistan trilateral meetings; the NATO, Afghanistan and Pakistan trilateral meetings; and the Turkey, Afghanistan and Pakistan forum to fight extremism and terrorism in the region. In late February, Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States held very constructive and frank trilateral talks about the new U.S. strategy.

President Karzai and President Zardari recently met in April in the Ankara Summit and in early May in Washington, D.C. Our foreign ministers, national security advisors, army chiefs of staff and chiefs of intelligence are meeting regularly. The frequency of these meetings must be matched by delivery of specific results. We need to move on from the high protocol of such forums to delivering on specific promised made.



We know that Pakistan's military view on Afghanistan is still in context to their relations with India. We are encouraging our US, NATO and regional friends to work harder to reduce the trust deficit between India and Pakistan. Ambassador Holbrooke is playing an important role.

### Iran

Iran has played a constructive role in Afghanistan, while keeping its destructive network in place. There is no loving relationship between Tehran and the Taliban. Afghanistan, Iran and the United States share common interests in the stabilization of Afghanistan and in fighting narcotics. We welcome the new policy by the Obama administration to engage Iran. The inclusion of Iran in the Hague Conference in late March was a very positive step forward.

### India

Afghanistan and India have historically had close friendly relations. We appreciate India's generous contributions to the reconstruction projects in Afghanistan including road-building, institutional capacity-building, training and higher education. India is concerned about the prospects of further instability in Pakistan and the region. We are aware of Pakistan sensitivities and welcome the efforts of the new civilian government to build trust between Pakistan and India.

### Central Asia

The real security threats to our northern neighbors—Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkemistan—are terrorism, radicalism, drug trafficking and organized crime, not a NATO or U.S. military presence. The potential for trade and commerce with Central Asian countries are much larger than the current volume. Some of the existing infrastructure is under-utilized due to restrictive and unpredictable trade policies.

### Saudi Arabia

Afghanistan greatly values our relations with the Muslim world and sees larger potential for further engagement. We are hoping to use the spiritual influence of His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz for the peace and reconciliation process in Afghanistan.

### United Arab Emirates

We greatly appreciate the support we have received from United Arab Emirates (UAE) not only in monetary pledges towards Afghanistan's reconstruction but also in the private sector investment. UAE firms are going to invest some \$4 billion in construction works, power, mineral resources and agriculture in Afghanistan. UAE is also assisting with certain Track II people-to-people engagement between Afghanistan and Pakistan to reduce tension and enhance cooperation.

### China



China, like the rest of the region, shares our concern about extremism and terrorism. Chinese firms have begun making serious investment in Afghanistan. We welcome the \$3.4 billion Chinese investment in Afghanistan's copper industry.

Seven years ago, we the Afghan people made certain commitments as part of our partnership with the international community. We promised that we Afghans would come together around a legitimate political process, and help build a new, democratic Afghan state. We promised to guarantee to our people, especially our women, the rights and freedoms that had been denied to them for decades. We promised to send our children to school, despite vicious attacks by terrorists. We promised to demobilize our formerly armed groups and integrate them into legitimate national institutions. We promised to a steadfast partner to the international community in the fight against terrorism and to continue to make sacrifices in this fight. We promised to use whatever opportunities afforded to us to build up our public institutions.

Today we take pride that we kept our promises, and delivered our commitments. However, we have had important setbacks and shortcomings too due to shortage of resources – but none due to lack of commitment or effort. As far as we are concerned, the process moved forward despite obstacles, and it will do so with certainty.

To the U.S. and NATO, we in Afghanistan are grateful for their generosity, and eternally indebted for the sacrifices of your young men and women, who served bravely for the cause of Afghanistan's security and the international war on terrorism. Afghanistan will never forget these sacrifices, and remains strongly committed to a long-term partnership with the alliance. We strongly reiterate our commitment to the strategic partnership between Afghanistan and the U.S.

To our neighbors in the region, we reiterate the Afghan people's strong desire to live in peace, harmony and prosperity with them. The future we are trying to build in Afghanistan is one that we will share in peace with Pakistan, with Iran, with our neighbors to our north, and with China, India and Russia, and it is a future that we cannot build without the goodwill and support of these neighbors. We in Afghanistan will spare no effort at promoting peace, friendship, trade and prosperity across the region and do hope that our regional partners will continue to reciprocate meaningfully.